

April 3, 2020

UPDATED: Occupational Health information & guidelines for pregnant healthcare workers

The worldwide literature regarding COVID-19 infection during pregnancy is small but growing daily. The Society of Obstetricians & Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC) recently released a statement with recommendations for the safe employment of pregnant healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reassuringly, the SOGC advises that pregnant women are not at significantly greater risk for more severe illness, should they contract COVID-19. Further, they advise that pregnant healthcare workers with appropriate personal protection equipment and training/practices may continue to work in clinical roles.

Whether you are a healthcare worker or not, the most effective intervention in any pandemic setting is prevention. For the healthcare worker, prevention includes consistent infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices and rigid use of personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate to their role. Centers for disease control (CDC) advises pregnancy does not in itself require alternate PPE.

In order to provide an extra measure of certainty and reassurance, Occupational Health supports pregnant healthcare workers avoiding the following roles *where possible*:

- Providing direct care to patients with confirmed or probable COVID-19, or
- Performing aerosol-generating medical procedures (AGMP), or
- Working within physical units/areas cohorting COVID-19 patients

Some pregnant healthcare workers may experience other concurrent medical conditions, complicating their status. As per protocol, such cases will be reviewed individually on their own merits by Occupational Health Safety & Wellness. Staff can submit medical documentation to their respective Zone Occupational Health and Wellness Department for review and discussion.

Pregnant healthcare workers may choose to begin their maternity leave early under the Employment Insurance Act. The collective agreements all provide the ability for pregnant employees to begin their pregnancy leave up to 16 weeks preceding their expected date of delivery. Alternatively, an employee may choose to access entitlement banks (i.e. vacation, time in lieu) or take an unpaid personal leave of absence prior to the start of their leave. Employees are asked to connect with their manager and the Benefits Department for any questions regarding these arrangements.